## CASANOVA OAK KNOLL NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION



PO BOX 2304, Monterey, CA 93942 Fax 831-375-3465 • Email conamonterey@aol.com

April 6, 2011

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City of Monterey PEEC DIVISION

City of Monterey City Hall Pacific & Madison Street Monterey, Calif. 93940

Dear Planning Commission Sub-committee on the North Fremont Specific Plan

Monterey Planning Commission

Monterey City Council

Re: -- North Fremont Specific Plan Planning Process

To whom it may concern:

The Casanova Oak Knoll Neighborhood Association has concerns regarding the direction that the North Fremont Specific Plan is taking and seeking some clarification as to intent by the city as we continue with this process. We offer this information as input to this issue.

From the efforts we are seeing, it appears that no one is paying attention to a reality of business: financial incentives are necessary for businesses to work to improve an area. In this case, if the desire is to improve a business district, it is important to work to make improvements to that district by pumping some money into such new development. Additionally, if the city does not have actual cash, they certainly can work to improve the potential that a developer can make money by working to improve the area with newer and more viable hotels, different facilities, nearby motels, etc. At the same time, the city needs to be working with local residents and current businesses to improve the area. Supporting such efforts would ensure a continuing and potentially improving revenue stream to the city.

To support a larger effort to encourage positive development along North Fremont, in the minutes of the many meetings we attended on this topic, we see no reference in those minutes of the detailed suggestions we made that serious attention be given to establishing a significant anchor site along North Fremont. Specifically, suggested that the city work towards developing a modest conference facility capability by combining the existing Travel Lodge complex with the next two adjacent motels. Since the Monterey County Fairgrounds building across the Fairground Rd. from the Travel Lodge are approximately the height of two additional floors on top of the current Travel Lodge complex, we suggested that utilizing the water credits and areas of the Lodge and next two adjacent motels (and their pools) should be enough to allow a new larger five (5) story hotel, restaurant, meeting rooms, parking and potentially more on the combined grounds. In a long term relationship with the current fairgrounds, we suggested that this development could benefit the city, local neighborhood, and fairgrounds by allowing RECEIVED



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additional modifications of the present site to allow more conference rooms and related capabilities on fairground property that could work with a new hotel facility on the North Fremont properties. Such a symbiotic relationship with the fairgrounds could benefit all with an enlarged meeting and conference facility co-located here. The increases in Transient Occupancy Taxes (TOT) and business would improve the image, capabilities and use of our main business street in this part of the city and any increase in traffic should be focused at the southern end of North Fremont. Combining VAF sites into a larger venue offer superior revenue increases for the City of Monterey while replacing blighted out of date motels.

Motels on North Fremont have no real incentive to update the mostly 1940's motels along the street. We feel that by working to develop a significant new building project along North Fremont will enliven the whole area and encourage other businesses to improve their image as well. Of a related concern to our association is an apparent drive to convert properties along North Fremont into otherwise occupied apartments that would deprive the city of important TOT at the same time reducing the existing number of rooms earning such taxes. Apartments do not earn TOT. We have asked but have not obtained a response, so we again request that an analysis be made of such revenue changes being suggested by city staff to check what the potential gain or loss in TOT would be with such a conversion to mixed use.

This association also has not seen effort to improve the pedestrian crossing safety issues we made in this process regarding North Fremont. We do not see mention of much of the information we have presented at the meetings of the North Fremont Business Owners meetings regarding our concerns about improvements needed to allow people sufficient time to cross the busy traffic street. Additionally, much of our concerns have been paved over by the plans to speed up Monterey-Salinas Transit buses along this street and NOT placing bulb-outs that would shorten the two points that people walking across the street must expose themselves to the traffic to accomplish. Once again, we are seeing our concerns by-passed. Does it require that people be injured or killed before we address the safety issue? Again, we ask the question, why does the signal light at Casa Verde and Del Monte allow more time than the intersections along North Fremont? Would not an increase in time crossing our intersections be an alternative to bulb-outs?

We would like to see greater efforts by city staff in consensus building during this project. It appears to be business people versus residents with staff making their own input appear to be the best approach. As an example, at one meeting, staff did a slide presentation of street scenes depicting different types of structural styles, colors, and offering different images of what a street could look like. One of the most frequent comments made was that the images depicted showed too many very large structures and multi-storied structures that the people did not like and commented about. Little mention was made of this later and it appeared that the staff was pushing the large, multi-story building for North Fremont instead of newer, shorter types of buildings. The people present made it clear they did not want the "canyon like impression that we have on Lighthouse." Indeed, it appears by many of the comments made by staff after our previous meetings, that these were different meetings or that the conclusions are those supporting staffs' ideas rather than many of those expressed at the meetings. Instead of showing the images



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and drawing conclusion from the audience, a staff member could have stood up and said, "how many people here want a limit of two-story buildings along the north end of the street?" and taken a vote. Then they could have asked, "how many people here want up to three-story buildings along the north end of the street?" and then another vote. We would have had an answer or arrived at some kind of consensus through staff lead discussions to reconcile differences. This did not happen.

This new type of planning process does not build community consensus. The community is shut out of the process of arguing pros and cons on each issue. While interests can generally be described as residential versus commercial, we see no apparent concern on the part of city development to accommodate the fact that this is where we live; it still appears that the goal is to give a lift up to those that make money off commercial properties. We need a better balance of interests.

We feel that our input to assist a growth potential for North Fremont is a good balance between meeting the objectives of preserving our way of living and working with the businesses along North Fremont to improve the district. It is a balance that we suggest is needed to improve the image and financial basis of this area.

If you would, please read this letter into the minutes of the next Planning Commission Sub-committee on the North Fremont Specific Plan meeting.

We ask that you look into this matter and get back to us. If you would like to set a meeting to discuss these issues, please call to set a date and time.

Sincerely,

Richard Ruccello, CONA president

Mike Brassfield, CONA Board member, NFBID delegate



April 18, 2011

Richard Ruccello, President Michael Brassfield, Board Member Casanova Oak Knoll Neighborhood Association Board P.O. Box 2304 Monterey, CA 93942

RE: North Fremont Specific Plan

Dear Mr. Ruccello, Mr. Brassfield, and Members of the CONA Board

We are responding to your letter dated April 6, 2011 in which you reveal a number of misconceptions that you and your Board members seem to have about the planning process for the North Fremont Specific Plan. We are confident, however, that we successfully and satisfactorily addressed all the issues you outlined in your letter during our North Fremont Subcommittee meeting on April 13<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 p.m. at which Mr. Brassfield was in attendance. We hope you agree that we now are now back on the same page and moving forward together to develop a plan for North Fremont that benefits the businesses and residents alike. With this letter, we are taking the opportunity to summarize some of the successes that have been achieved through this planning process to date, as well as to summarize our response to the issues you raise in your letter, the City's intent for the development of the North Fremont Specific Plan and, our approach to public involvement in this process.

In December 2009, the City Council adopted a work plan and authorized staff initiation of planning process for the North Fremont Specific Plan. The work plan details specific tasks as well as the public outreach process, timeline, meeting dates, etc., which can be viewed at each project website: <a href="https://www.monterey.org/northfremontplan">www.monterey.org/northfremontplan</a>.

The intent of the specific plan as a planning tool is to encourage development that meets the goals and policies of the General Plan, as validated by the City Council in December 2010. The City Council also validated the build-out assumptions to include two to three-story mixed-use construction along the North Fremont corridor. In order to create a planning tool that effectively achieves the General Plan goals, it is essential to include all interest groups in the planning process. Intensification of use adjacent to existing

residential neighborhoods is a sensitive topic that has been carefully analyzed from the beginning of the planning process to address potential impacts resulting from traffic, parking, and building height.

The City of Monterey is fortunate in that its citizens care deeply about the City and actively participate in every planning process that involves their community. The specific plan scope of work has focused on public participation that included community workshops, subcommittee meetings, team charrettes, and innovative online and outreach tools. The outreach methodology was designed to include all stakeholders and summarize the variety of interests that reflect the diversity of interests represented. Project stakeholders for each planning area are varied and include representative groups from a wide range of economic, cultural and political backgrounds, including local business owners, adjacent residential area residents, and minority stakeholders (elderly citizens, tourists, and ethnic groups), who both live in the region and commute to the planning area for work.

Staff's role in the process is to facilitate the public outreach program, to solicit input from all stakeholders, to assert their expertise as professional planners in developing a plan that addresses the variety of issues, opinions, and ideas that have been expressed and summarized throughout this inclusive planning process; and finally to present a product to the decisionmakers for consideration.

## To date, staff has facilitated:

- four public workshops (two located in the business district, two located at the CONA center) during various times of the day and night, weekdays and weekends, to accommodate the widest variety of schedule conflicts,
- two repeats of the workshops during North Fremont Business District meetings.
- four subcommittee meetings, and
- four Planning Commission and City Council meetings to provide progress reports and confirm the project vision and goals.

Staff has also completed a preliminary draft of four chapters of the specific plan, which was the topic of discussion during the April 13<sup>th</sup> Subcommittee meeting, which was open to the public and attended by business owners, property owners, and residents. The draft specific plan has been published on the project website since April 6, 2011 (<a href="https://www.monterey.org/northfremontplan">www.monterey.org/northfremontplan</a>). Notification of this meeting and the pending availability of the draft plan was circulated on March 31, 2011 to a mailing list of over 500 property owners, business owners, residents, and other stakeholders, and to include in your CONA newsletter per your request. It may be that if you did not have the opportunity to review the draft product before you prepared your letter. As was demonstrated at yesterday's subcommittee meeting, the draft plan addresses many of the concerns you raise in your letter.

Your letter outlines a concern regarding the City's intent to invest its General Fund capital in the North Fremont planning area. Part of what makes the specific plan such an effective planning tool is the State law requirement that it include a plan for financing capital improvements identified in the plan. Because the financing plan is based primarily on the proposed streetscape and parking improvements, this chapter of the plan will not be completed until the Citywide Transportation and Parking Study is complete and policy decisions are made that will affect these aspects of the specific plan.

Regarding other possible strategies for providing incentives to encourage positive development referred to in your letter and your concern that staff has disregarded your ideas and suggestions, the meeting summaries do indeed include and reflect these suggestions, as does the draft specific plan itself. Please reference the draft specific plan pages 12-13, 18-22, and Figure 8 Opportunity Sites, which identifies the Travel Lodge site as a prime site for redevelopment for the same reasons you cite. The specific plan includes a discussion on opportunity sites, catalyst sites, and the VAF sites in particular, concurrent with your ideas and suggestions.

Next, you note that "this association has not seen effort to improve the pedestrian crossing safety issues" you raised during the planning process. Monterey Salinas Transit (MST) staff has represented the agency's interest as a stakeholder in this planning process from its outset. Implementation of an effective Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line that attracts ridership is imperative to achieving the General Plan goals of creating a mixed-use, transit-oriented neighborhood along North Fremont Street. As noted above, the Citywide Transportation and Parking Study is underway. In February, the consultants and staff toured North Fremont Street to examine and discuss your issues and concerns. While the bulb-out design was one possible solution to the pedestrian crossing issue, staff and the consultants are working on identifying other solutions to the safety issues for consideration by our decisionmakers. These and other Citywide project alternatives will be vetted during a three-day public charrette next month.

Regarding your desire for staff to serve as a mediator between the businesses and residents, the public outreach program outlined above for the planning process is designed to provide ample opportunity for public input throughout the planning process. Throughout the public workshops, staff has received valuable input from all stakeholders on issues, opportunities, alternatives, evaluation of alternatives, and preferred design features. Throughout the planning process, staff's role is to prepare a plan that meets the goals of the General Plan and balances the stakeholder interests. As a professional, the planner does in fact synthesize a solution that he or she can recommend to the decisionmakers. Full consensus is rarely achieved. However, ample opportunity is given through this type of planning process for stakeholders to remove themselves from their positions and seek a common solution, if they so choose to participate.

Your reference to the visual preference survey is an excellent example of such an opportunity. As you correctly outlined, the survey was designed to solicit input on architectural styles, colors, and other design features. It was made clear, however, that the survey was not to solicit consensus on appropriate building height. The desire for a low building height along North Fremont is an example of a position. The issues surrounding this position, such as privacy, light, views, mass, and bulk, have been identified and addressed throughout the planning process. The specific plan includes a "Sensitive Areas" map and another graphic depicting "buffer areas" that relate to several design guidelines that require new development to demonstrate a particular sensitivity to this issue. Again, once we are given the chance to "move off our position" and work together to seek ways to address the issue, we can achieve a win-win.

In conclusion, we look forward to your continued participation in this important planning process for North Fremont. The specific plan is shaping up. Many issues have been addressed but more input is needed to ensure that the plan is the best it can be.

Sincerely,

Jeff Haferman City Council Member Subcommittee Member

Planning Commissioner Subcommittee Member

CC: City Council

Planning Commission

Paul Davis

Planning Commissioner Subcommittee Member

Michael Dawson

Architectural Review Committee

Subcommittee Member